

**Testimony of James Davis, Associate Professor and
Deputy Chair for Graduate Studies at Brooklyn College
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

**Concerning Funding for Adjunct Health Insurance
In the CUNY Budget Request (Calendar Item 3.A.)**

21 November, 2011

I'm James Davis, an Associate Professor of English at Brooklyn College. My department relies as heavily on adjuncts as any at my college. Each semester, we employ about 80 adjuncts, twice as many as our full-time faculty. They are my valued colleagues, and in many cases, my friends. I remember very clearly being in their position after finishing my PhD. I was an adjunct faculty member for three years before finding a tenure-track position. I was grateful to have work in my field, but it was a precarious existence, as I lived paycheck to paycheck. I was fortunate to have health insurance through my spouse, but this is not the situation for many adjuncts.

Since then, it has become even harder to get a tenure-track job in the humanities as employers seek to keep costs down. Health care costs have skyrocketed and the trend nationwide is to make employees shoulder increasingly larger portions. I was heartened to learn of Chancellor Goldstein's commitment to solicit state funds to stabilize health care for those City University of New York (CUNY) adjuncts who qualify. It is the least we can do to provide this basic support for a cohort on whom we rely so heavily to do the teaching at this university. Beyond the moral reasons to ensure a fundamental level of health care for long-serving adjuncts, there are three additional reasons that I hope the Chancellor will uphold his commitment:

Parity with State University of New York

Unlike CUNY, the SUNY system has taken an important step against the two-tiered labor system. Just as SUNY now provides long-serving adjuncts with access to the same health plan as its full-timers, so CUNY should do much more than it currently does. Conditions for adjunct faculty are precarious enough without the added insult of failing to qualify, even after many years of service, for health care that is comparable to their full-time colleagues.

Keep pace with expansion of the contingent workforce

When the rate at which CUNY paid into the Welfare Fund to support adjunct health care was first established, the number of adjuncts in the university was far lower than today. That rate has not increased with the dramatic expansion of our adjunct workforce. There is a stark problem of equity here.

Move to New York City health plan

While stabilizing the Welfare Fund budget to provide health care to long-serving adjuncts must be the university's short-term priority, this is an unsustainable arrangement in the long run. The university should move qualifying adjuncts to the city's health care plan, which serves other city employees like them.

I applaud Chancellor Goldstein's recognition of this issue as critical to the advancement of the university. As he faces the inevitable resistance Albany will offer in the face of his request, I encourage him to recall the scope and depth of the desire among all CUNY faculty to ensure that this funding is stabilized and, in the long term, enhanced.